

Dear Parent,

Greetings! As the school year begins, I'd like to provide you with some information about me, about our 8th grade Language Arts program, my approaches to teaching and learning, and your son/daughter's responsibilities as a student.

I am currently in my twentieth first year of teaching school-my fifth year here at East Middle School. Previously I taught for Virginia Beach City Schools. In addition, I served as Co Director of the Tidewater Writing Project, an affiliate of the National Writing Project, a federally and locally funded organization whose primary aim is to improve the teaching of writing (and reading-the two are inseparable) in our schools. A highlight of the writing project's year is the Invitational Summer Writing Institute, a six credit graduate program at Old Dominion University. On a more personal note, I am wife to Frank, who is currently working for Rocky Mountain Health, and mother to Jen, a hydro-geologist and yoga teacher working in Maui, Hawaii. (If I disappear, you'll know where to find me!)

If I were to ask you to name the most important thing your child will learn in Language Arts as required by the State of Colorado, what would you name? Reading? Literature? Writing? Grammar? Spelling? Vocabulary? Speech? Social Skills?

**The Four Main components of Language Arts:
Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening**

It's important to note that most of our English Language Arts time is spent reading, writing, speaking, and listening. My experience in teaching students of all ages tells me that the most important thing they can do to serve themselves as students and as learners is to read, read, read, talk, talk, talk, and write, write, write. Fill in the blank exercises and rote memorization are of little use if students have no time to apply the skills they are taught. As a general method throughout the year we will take a cooperative reading/writing inquiry approach to learning.

Homework this year will consist primarily of reading, writing, and occasionally interviewing or studying. While the focus of our year will not be the rote learning of spelling, vocabulary, and grammar, we will integrate these with our reading and writing, and students will receive periodic quizzes in these areas. They will need to study in order to do well. You should see regular-almost daily- reading and writing occurring at home, just like I expect to see regular reading and writing occurring here at school.

The best way for you as a parent to know what your son or daughter's specific homework assignments are is to demand that s/he keep a running assignment book. The student planner is perfect for this. Your student will be given the opportunity to record each assignment in her/his student planner during the school day. Ask to see it regularly.

There are three main places to look if you want to see the specific work that your child is doing: the writing folder (used for works in progress), the portfolio (graded assignments, quizzes, and finished products), and the reading journal. Everything is stored here in class, but they are available for your son or daughter to show you at any time.

I hope this letter is helpful to you. Please remember that you are welcome to visit, write, or call me at any time. Best wishes as you carry out what I know is a difficult and daunting responsibility- parenting!

Yours truly,
Debra Weller
dweller@mesa.k12.co.us